

The Notebook: A Tool for Writing and Living

In her memoir, *Little by Little*, Jean Little remembers the moment she began to live like a writer. She was home, sick in bed, and her mother brought her a fleet of orange slices on a white plate. Jean says, "I lined the bright little boats up, one behind the other, on the windowsill beside me. The world outside was dark, and the wood of the windowsill was a mahogany brown. The orange segments glowed against the sombre background. I loved the look of them. I could hardly bear to spoil it by eating one." As Jean took the farthest-away orange slice and began to chew the pulp, she realized with a pang that in a day she'd forget how beautiful the line of glowing orange boats looked. "It's part of my life," she thought, "and I am forgetting it." She straightened her shoulders, stared at the brave little fleet and said, "I will remember, as long as I live, how these orange boats look right now." Reflecting back on this moment in her memoir, Jean says, "What mattered was that for the first time I saw my world and my life as something that belonged to me, and began to put small scraps of time away in a place where I could take them out and look at them whenever I needed to remember" (1987, 92-93).

When people ask those of us who staff the Teachers College Writing Project about our goals, we sometimes answer that our first goal is for young people to cherish the sight of orange slices lined up on a windowsill. We cannot give youngsters rich lives. We cannot give them long family suppers full of shared stories, rainbow-colored markers and sheaves of drawing paper, photograph albums full of memories, and beautiful picture books lined up beside their beds. We can't give children rich lives, but we can give them the lens to appreciate the richness that is already there in their lives. Notebooks validate a child's existence. Notebooks say, "Your thoughts, your noticings, your fleet of orange slices matter."

Byrd Baylor's wonderful picture book, *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*, has helped all of us understand that the process of keeping a notebook is an act of listening and celebration. The book opens with a girl from the Southwest desert country saying, "Sometimes people ask me, 'Aren't you lonely out there with just desert around you?'" It is a question that can be asked of all of us and all our children. "Aren't you lonely out there with just your classroom and your apartment?" "Aren't you lonely out there with whatever your life holds?" When Byrd Baylor's heroine is asked, "Aren't you lonely out there with just desert around you?" she responds, in astonishment,

I guess they mean
the beargrass
and the yuccas
and the cactus
and the rocks.

I guess they mean
the deep ravines
and the hawk nests
in the cliffs
and the coyote trails
that wind
across the hills.

"Lonely?"

I can't help
laughing
when they ask me
that.

I always look at them . . .
surprised.
And I say,
"How could I be lonely?
I'm the one
in charge of
celebrations."

As the girl proceeds to explain, it is her notebook that helps her see and appreciate her life and her landscape. In her notebook, she captures moments and scenes she plans to remember for the rest of her life. "You can tell what's worth a celebration," she says, "because your heart will POUND . . . and you'll catch your breath like you were breathing some new kind of air."

Helping Youngsters Anticipate the Role of Notebooks

The way to launch notebooks, then, is for us teachers to buy ourselves a book—or find a file, a box, a bag—and begin living our lives with the consciousness that "My life belongs to me, it matters. I need to put scraps of time

and thought away in order to take them out later, to live with and linger with them." Once we have begun to incorporate notebooks into our lives, we can invite youngsters to do the same.

Many of us in the Teachers College Writing Project—teachers, children, and Project staff alike—carry our notebooks with us all the time. We read with notebooks beside us. We listen to the news and teach and travel and eat with our notebooks in hand. Like the young girl Kate in Jean Little's book, *Hey World, Here I Am!*, we have found it important to choose our own notebook. Kate writes:

When Mother told my sister Marilyn that I loved to write, she sent me a journal for my birthday. . . . It had a shiny pink cover with MY DIARY written on it in scrolled, gold letters. . . . Every page had two skimpy sections, with a date at the top of each. There was space enough for maybe three sentences if your handwriting was small. My handwriting scrawls. Besides, my life is too big to fit into those squinched-up pages. I gave it to my friend Lindsay Ross. She adores it. She has a smaller life . . .

Then Dad gave me a journal. It is elegant . . . I love it. Maybe, someday, my life will be elegant enough to match it. I hope so. I'm saving it carefully just in case. (1986, 73)

The notebook Kate bought for herself has lots of room, and there are no dates at the top of each page. Some days she fills seven pages; other days she writes only "Another day lived through!" "Getting a journal," she says, "is like buying shoes. You have to find the one that fits. And you are the only person who can tell if it pinches" (1986, 74).

Teachers and children will want to choose their own notebooks. Mine is a looseleaf notebook. Shelley's is a bound book with blank pages. Anne Gianatiempo's is a composition book covered with a quilted fabric. Judy Davis turned an empty spiral into her notebook. Each person must carefully choose the form his or her notebook will take.

When I returned to Anne's classroom after the storytelling circle, almost every child had a notebook to hold overhead and wave in the air, and the diversity of notebooks was well worth celebrating. Marcella had brought a blank book that her mother had given her. Other students had brought marble-covered notebooks, steno pads, small spirals. Over time, some children would cover their notebooks with richly colored African fabrics, others with laminated paper. Some would make special sacks for carrying their notebooks and others would staple together their own tiny portable notepads, which they would periodically disassemble and paste into their notebooks. "It's the bond between the writer and his or her notebook that matters most," Project member Vicki Vinton says.

Nothing magical happens simply because youngsters bring notebooks to school. Notebooks can be just another place for writing, or they can represent a new way of thinking about the writing process. The most obvious way in

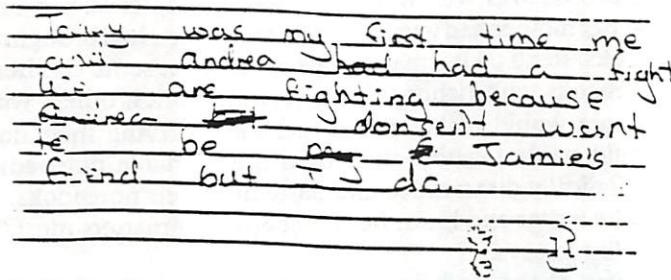
which notebooks have altered my views of writing is that they have served as a concrete, physical invitation to write without requiring me to view my scrawlings as rough drafts of anything in particular. Notebooks have embodied the idea that we put bits of our lives and our thinking into print not only to produce compositions but also because we do not want to walk around unwritten (Gass 1979). Notebooks have been, for me and for the students with whom I work, an invitation to generate entries, notes, lists, drafts, observations, ramblings on millions of topics and on no particular topic at all. In bringing the idea of notebooks into classrooms, the challenge is more than finding a way for young writers to go through the motions of keeping such a notebook. The challenge is, instead, for them to be so clear about the value of writing that they, too, do not want to walk around unwritten. We want youngsters to value writing. We hope they will begin to carry pencils and pads of paper with them, that they will keep pens beside the phone and in the car and near their books. This is important, first because such writing changes our living, and then because it also changes the composing we eventually do.

Even if youngsters are just at the stage of beginning to collect bits of their lives, it's enormously helpful for them to have a farsighted vision of the role these entries might eventually play in creating finished pieces of writing. When Judy Davis introduced notebooks to her youngsters, therefore, she did so by sharing with them examples of children's writing from Anne Giana-tiempo's P.S. 148 classroom. Judy read aloud from the opening pages of Luz Gordillo's notebook, in which Luz roamed about among many topics. Luz chronicled a relationship with her friend, recalled the day her cousin died, commented on the ending of a book, talked about mysterious footprints she found outside her front door, and described herself looking at the empty apartment in which her best friend had once lived.

Judy used an overhead projector to show her students how the appearance and tone of Luz's entries changed over the course of those days. On September 17 Luz wrote the piece shown in Figure 4-1:

Today was my first time me and Andrea had a fight. We are fighting because Andrea doesn't want to be Jamie's friend but I do.

Figure 4-1 Luz's Writing, September 17



Today was my first time me
and Andrea had a fight
We are fighting because
Andrea ~~don't~~ doesn't want
to be ~~me~~ Jamie's
friend but I do.

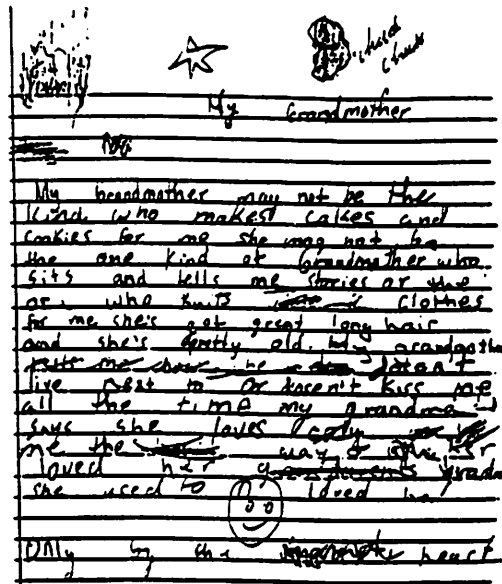
About a week later, Luz wrote the entry shown in Figure 4-2:

My Grandmother may not be the kind who makes cakes and cookies for me. She may not be the one kind of grandmother who sits and tells me stories or the one who knits clothes for me. She's got great long hair and she's pretty old. My grandmother doesn't live next to me or doesn't kiss me all the time. My grandma says she loves me the way her grandmother loved her. Only by the heart.

Luz is a skilled writer, and it is not surprising that this entry, like many others, reads like a very nice first draft. The year before, in third grade, Luz would certainly have stayed with her grandmother piece, fixing it up and filing it into her Final Writing Folder. This year, however, Anne had encouraged Luz to wait over the course of many entries for a topic to emerge that had the potential to become not just a nice piece of writing but a writing project with scope and significance.

As Judy explained to her students, in order to find the seed for a longer writing project, Luz read and reread her notebook. One of the things she looked for was bits of language—a phrase, a paragraph, a page—that felt alive. Sometimes Luz took those bits and expanded them into entries that branched off from earlier entries. Luz also reread her notebook looking for selections that surprised her, that troubled her, that deserved more attention.

Figure 4-2 Luz's Writing, a Week Later



This had not been one of Luz's best entries, but if this entry lifted itself off page saying, "Write me," Luz was right to return to it. After writing more about her father leaving Colombia, Luz shifted into the long, rambling entry shown in Figure 4-3, which recaptured the life she loved in Colombia. Judy read a passage of this aloud to her children. She read:

~~I'm looking at the sun~~
~~and I'm back from it~~
~~at 3:00 PM~~
~~the sun is up and its so high~~
~~it gives light to everyone~~
~~could dance outside at night~~
~~around my neighborhood there's~~
~~hundreds of stars they all~~
~~are night lights who waiting~~
~~for everyone to go inside~~
~~so that the night lights~~
~~can be shut the moon waits~~
~~all night like owl waiting~~
~~my neighborhood to wake up~~
~~so that it can see the moon~~
~~could go to sleep and the~~
~~sun can come out like a new~~
~~day a new day in my~~
~~neighborhood the one that looks~~
~~like a country~~

when I wake up I
look outside my neighborhood
looks like the country
morning

[illegible]

ing for everyone to go inside so that the night lights can be shut off. The moon waits all night like an owl waiting for my neighborhood to wake up. . . . I look outside. My neighborhood looks like the country morning.

By this time, Judy told her class, a center of gravity had emerged in Luz's notebook. Luz had decided on her topic but still wasn't ready to start on a rough draft. She needed more time to live with her topic, to fill herself with it. Luz now made sure most of her entries addressed the theme of leaving Colombia for the United States. She wrote a long, focused entry about being afraid that when she arrived in the United States, unable to speak the language, children would look at her as if she were some kind of animal. She wrote a detailed account of packing her suitcases. She interviewed her sister about coming to America.

Because somewhere along the way Luz had decided she was writing rough drafts rather than entries, she moved from her notebook onto composition paper. Luz tried three different versions of a lead sentence and altered her draft somewhat based on a peer conference. Now her writing process was very much like it had been the year before, and it was very much like the process I describe in *The Art of Teaching Writing*. One of Luz's drafts began like this:

As the plane took off, I looked out the window. I could see all the little houses, everything. I was sad and unhappy. Everything I left behind was now a long memory, my whole life was only a memory. My house, my school, my friends were disappearing in clouds as we went up and up. I could only see the clouds now. I felt a tear fall on my face. It was a magical tear. This was going to be my last cry. I remember the look on my grandma's face. She was as red as an apple about to explode and throw out all her tears onto the new shiny airplane. She would wash it and clean up with her memories. My grandpa took her hand and held her close. I didn't want to throw away all those happy times and sad times. I looked again at my grandparents' faces. They were about to throw out our memories in a whole bunch of tears. . . .

Luz decided this long, rich draft could become a source of several pieces of writing, including a poem, a letter to her Colombian grandmother, and a picture book. This is the text of her picture book:

We were on our way to the airport. We were on our way to leave Colombia forever. Everything seemed so ugly, so unfair. My whole life, my whole world, would soon be just a memory.

In the airplane, I looked at my mother. She just sat there. My sister was quiet as a turtle. My grandpa had stopped crying but I knew he still felt terrible. The houses of Colombia below me looked like

toys, and I wanted them. I felt like an infant crying out for my mother to buy me toys.

I can still envision my grandpa's face. He was quiet. All he could do was hold my grandma's hand. His tears fell quietly down his cheeks. Grandma only stared; no words, no tears.

Finally we arrived. In a little room, a man told me to sign a paper and I'd be legally from the United States. "But I want to be legally from Colombia," I said to my mother.

We finally got out of the little room, and we got our pack. I saw two men. One was my Uncle Ruben. The other was short and skinny. He reached to pick me up. It was my father. I gave him a kiss. I had lost my country but won my father.

Judy showed her class other examples of children using notebooks, and these examples included work by younger children as well as by less skilled writers. She told them about Arthur, who noticed upon rereading his notebook that he had several entries in which he depicted his life in a hotel for the homeless. Anne Gianatiempo had helped Arthur realize that those entries could become a letter asking someone—perhaps Governor Cuomo—to do something about the crack addicts in the stairwell and the starving babies wailing from behind closed doors. Once Arthur decided to tackle this project, he spent a few days collecting more memories and descriptions of the hotel, and then, before he moved to rough draft paper, he searched through magazines and newspapers for letters to the editor that could serve as models for him.

Judy also told her students about a cluster of youngsters who noticed they each had entries about animals. They decided to make an anthology of animal stories modeled after Cynthia Rylant's *Every Living Thing*. To do this, they made posters that read, "Writers at P.S. 148 are invited to submit manuscripts." On these posters, they listed details about the board of reviewers and the process of selection for the anthology. Then, while they waited for incoming manuscripts, they each lived with and extended their animal entries, turning them into stories.

Notebooks Help Us Lead Wide-Awake Lives

For all of this to happen in our classrooms, teachers must not only keep notebooks, but we must also let those notebooks nudge us toward living with the sense that "my life and my ideas are important enough to me. I am going to record and savor them." The important thing is that we let those notebooks help us lead more wide-awake lives.

In speaking about the essential contribution writing can make to a person's life, Katherine Paterson described watching the cicada bug shed its skin. She and her son David watched as a tiny slit in the bug's back was gradually pulled down, as though the bug had a waist-length zipper, and they saw a hint of color through the slit. Then there were more colors—green, yellow, aqua,

cream, and flecks of gold like jewelry on its head. Then the wings emerged, first crumpled ribbons, then stretched out. As they watched, the cicada bug swung like an acrobat onto a new twig and eventually flew off, "oblivious to the wake of wonder it had left behind." Paterson says, "As I let that wonder wash over me I realized that this was the gift I really wanted to give my children, for what good are straight teeth and trumpet lessons to a person who cannot see the grandeur that the world is charged with?" (1981, 20).

It's not only children who overlook the grandeur the world is charged with. Most of us live with blinders on. It's particularly hard to see the grandeur of the world when we are in schools, where the watchword has often been "Clear your desks off so we can begin." The title of Albert Cullum's book, *The Geranium on the Window Sill Just Died, But Teacher You Went Right On*, not only speaks of what schools do to children, it also speaks of what schools do to teachers. Our schools and our age are well characterized in Dan Jaffe's poem, "The Forecast":

Perhaps our age has driven us indoors.
We sprawl in the semi-darkness . . .
But we have snapped our locks, pulled down our shades,
Taken all precautions. We shall not be disturbed.
If the earth shakes, it will be on a screen;
And if the prairie wind spills down our streets
And covers us with leaves, the weatherman will tell us.

When students and teachers have snapped the locks and pulled down the shades, it's not enough in writing workshops to give us topic choice, time for writing, and mini-lessons on focus and telling details. Notebooks can become a habit of life, one that helps us recognize that our lives are filled with material for writing. "Look at the world," notebooks seem to say. "Look at the world in all its grandeur and all its horror. Let it matter."

For this to happen, it is crucial that notebooks leave the four walls of the classroom, and it is also crucial that they be out on children's desks throughout the school day. When writers carry notebooks everywhere, the notebooks nudge us to pay attention to the little moments that normally only flicker into our consciousness. Roy writes, "When my baby brother doesn't go to sleep, I tell him about tomorrow. When he still doesn't, I tell him about his party." Annabelle writes, "I was just thinking about how much I miss my cats. This might sound weird, but my two cats loved all the same music and movies that I did." Annabelle's entry about her cats is accompanied by several small sketches. She, like many other children, includes flow charts, portraits, and diagrams in her notebook. Sandra writes, "When I saw these old ladies in my building and how they stop talking when I get there, I always wonder what they were talking about," and later, "I'm always wondering how people are going to look when they grow up. I don't know why, but I wonder this about a lot of people." Angelo writes, "I remember my father and my mother would have fist fights. I was too small to break things but I used to watch with my

fists clenched." Ten-year-old Chris Ralph writes, "My tooth is loose. It's probably the last tooth I have to lose." Later that same day, he writes the entries in Figure 4-4.

"I compost my life," Murray says in describing "the great garage sale of junk" from which his notebook—and eventually, his writing—is made, "piling up phrases which do not yet make sense, lines overheard in a restaurant, scenes caught in the corner of my eyes, pages not yet understood, questions not yet shaped, thoughts half begun, problems unsolved, answers without questions" (1989, 242). Children, the great collectors of life, learn to use notebooks in similar ways.

Figure 4-4 Chris's Three Entries

Why do people die? Do they die
to live again? Maybe people die to be punished
or rewarded. I would like to know, but
I want to have fun while I live.

What makes people cry?

I look out the window and see
tiny drops of water being blown by the
wind. They run from current to current,
like a billion little ants in a war over
food. Attacking, retreating, attacking, retreating, attacking
and they hit the ground dead until it rains
again.

I was reading The Swiss
Family Robinson and kept noticing
that the author kept ~~saying~~
saying "replied I" or "said I".
I was surprised when this happened.
It is an interesting way to say
~~an~~ something. I think it makes
a simple saying look complicated and mature.

I find it amazing when an
author knows some tricks, or ~~has~~ uses
great language, but doing both is
fantastic. It really shows
the talent of the author.

In her notebook, seven-year-old Sunit relived a single moment at the grocery store. She'd fetched carrots for her mother and had thrown them into the shopping cart when she said to herself, "I love my mom," and hugged the familiar legs of the lady beside her. Looking up, her arms still around the skirt, Sunit saw her mother across the aisle. "Then whose legs am I hugging?" she thought. After skipping a few lines in her notebook, Sunit went on to jot down the words to "Mary Mary, Quite Contrary." Then she taped in a magazine advertisement for a breed of dwarf horses and listed what she'd done over the weekend. Then she took part of that list, "Saturday morning, playing in the park," and in hurried print, she wrote:

An empty park
Lots of benches
Lots of checker boards.
No leaves on trees
A cold day
A sunny day
Very sunny.
A quiet day
It's easy to find people in the yard.

Without pausing for a transition, Sunit shifted to a related memory.

Mini-Lessons, Conferences, and Share Sessions That Encourage Wide-Awakeness

The diversity in Chris's and Sunit's notebooks—which demonstrates a crucial willingness to take in life through many different lenses—did not happen automatically or accidentally. If left to their own devices, Sunit and Chris might have filled their notebooks with memories, each beginning, "I remember when . . ." and each filling a single page. Alternatively, depending on their sense of what was expected of them, they might have filled their notebooks with a cryptic list of possible topics, or with emotional ventings, or with summaries of the preceding day's events. Instead, they have done all of these and more. Their notebooks are collages, "garage sales of junk," treasure chests.

When notebooks are very new in a classroom, the workshops sometimes begin with everyone gathering for a mini-lesson in which writers learn some ways in which others have used notebooks in their lives. In these mini-lessons, we may tell the class about how Jane Yolen pulled off the highway in a snowstorm to scrawl down a phrase she'd heard on the car radio. The announcer, trying to sell a fence, described it as "horse-high, hog-tight, and bull-strong." Yolen thought the words were too good to lose. Months later, they led to the first paragraph of *The Inway Investigators*:

What makes a good fence? Grandad used to say being "horse-high, hog-tight, and bull-strong." And Uncle Henry, my guardian, winks

and says, "Good neighbors make good fences." Only when I ask him what he means by that, he just laughs and says I'll understand in a while. (1973, 15)

Once teachers and children in the Project learn that Jane Yolen copies down phrases she has overheard and glories in the way people talk, this strategy becomes contagious. Tiffany Wooten, for example, explored the way her mother's talk changes when they return to her mother's childhood home in North Carolina:

But when we go to North Carolina my mother's talk is different. She tells me about the times she was tough like a boy. She tells me how she scared her sister and how she had the biggest responsibility because she was the oldest. "Tiff, doesn't it feel good to smell the country air and listen to the birds, walk on grass in wintertime and get things so cheap?" she says, and then we laugh. Thinking about my mother, so lucky to be born in North Carolina, I can't forget North Carolina talk.

Sharon Taberski, a teacher of teachers in Brooklyn, found it revealing when a colleague described teaching first grade as being like pulling teeth.

She found it revealing when a little girl said, after working and reworking a poem, "I've got the words, but I'm trying to get the music into them." Weeks later, the little girl's words were the opening to a speech Sharon Taberski made to 150 Project principals. "My colleagues and I often feel that we, too, 'have the words' but are trying 'to get the music into them,'" Sharon said.

It's important that Sharon let her students and her colleagues know not only that she recorded overheard language in her notebook, but also that these phrases ignited a whole process of thinking and writing. What Sharon has done is an essential part of composition. She saw a little girl sitting with wads of discarded drafts, struggling to make her words sing. Sharon jotted down some notes about the way the girl described her struggles. She recorded the girl's sentence for no particular reason except that it resonated for her, and then Sharon continued to go about her life with the notebook at her side. Later, as she watched a teacher struggle to feel at home with new ideas on teaching, Sharon was suddenly reminded of what the little girl said: "I've got the words, but I'm trying to get the music into them." It ignited a spark in Sharon's mind, and she began to write her way into a brand new idea.

It is as we explore possibilities with our own notebooks that we generate possibilities for our children's notebooks—and vice versa. Everything we and our colleagues do and everything our students do provides seeds for mini-lessons, conferences, **share sessions**. There is, therefore, lots of shop talk about notebooks among the **circle** of notebook keepers in our Project. How many pages a day? Lined or **unlined** paper? Are the entries dated, numbered, nei-

ther? How many of the entries are abbreviated jottings? Clippings, quotes, lists, freewritings, drafts?

In a mini-lesson or in a writing conference, we may tell the class about how we or another author described a scene, excerpted lines from a story, interviewed an authority, explored a puzzling thought, listed questions, returned to an earlier entry, or outlined possible stories. The writers in Sunit's class, for example, may learn about the nursery rhyme she included in her notebook. They may learn about pasting clippings and copying quotations into their notebooks. They may learn about savoring the image of a fleet of orange segments. They may learn that some writers keep notebooks close at hand as they read, knowing that if a book is right for them, they may end up wanting to write something that pushes off from the text. We scout for these mini-lessons by learning what published authors do, by seeing what we and our colleagues do, and most of all, by celebrating what the young writers in our classrooms do.

In a mini-lesson or a conference, for example, we might let youngsters know that other writers in the classroom use notebooks as research instruments. We may tell children, for example, about how Ipolito brought his notebook onto the roof to record what his pigeons do as he feeds them. We may tell children about how Erin, a pixielike seven-year-old, overheard her teacher describing someone as having salt-and-pepper hair and scribbled the phrase in her notebook. When Erin inserted the phrase into a third-person fictional story she wrote months later, she learned that research doesn't have to involve stacks of carefully coded index cards and footnotes and worry over bibliographies, and that it isn't confined to the genre of research reports. Research is what learners do as we live our lives.

In mini-lessons and conferences we will also want to tell youngsters about how we and others use notebooks as a place for responding to reading. When Judy Davis read Jean Fritz's memoir, *Homesick*, aloud to her class, many children wrote entries in response. *Homesick* tells the story of growing up in China and of Jean Fritz's desperate loneliness for the magical country of America. When Jean finally reaches America, she finds herself out of place here, too, and so, ultimately, this is a book about everyone's search to belong.

As Hau Ha Lam listened to her teacher reading *Homesick*, she wrote wrenchingly in her notebook:

My heart has split in two; one belongs to China and the other belongs to the people who filled my life with joy.

The great memories of China always fill my heart with joy. The big blue river of China makes beautiful waves and oh, how I remember the sun and how it made me want to shout with glee. On hot summer days the sea seemed to call me. How can I sum up the way I feel about a place? If you looked at the sea, all you would see are people on the river in their boats. . . .

When I walk into my house [in New York City], I feel like somebody locked me in. The walls are closing in on me. There are more dishes to be washed and a little brother to be looked after. Soon I can't see the sunlight. . . . Why not stay happy and playful. . . . Now I know how growing up feels.

Natalia does not share Fritz's and Hau Ha Lam's Chinese heritage, but she does share their sense of being displaced. In her notebook she wrote:

Leaving Poland was hard. Leaving those beautiful castles, leaving my grandparents, leaving the milkman who comes every morning and the walks to the bakery and my cousins and their rabbits was hard. Anytime I have to leave I cry big, sad tears. When I look out the window of the airplane my insides turn to mush.

Now that I'm not in Poland, I talk to my parents about Poland a lot. Anytime I see a boxer, I think about my grandfather's dog. I talk about my cousins, etc., etc. When I am walking down a street and I feel a wind that is like a "Polish wind," my mind switches and suddenly I'm in Lodz.

Often, teachers and children will write notebook entries in response to the books we read on our own. In Karen Rosner's Bronx classroom, for example, Ramell Craven wrote a brief entry in response to Katherine Paterson's *Park's Quest*:

I'm reading this book because my father was in Vietnam but he didn't die. But if he would of died, I would be like Park.

Later, Ramell went back to this entry and expanded it on a separate sheet of paper he then slid into his notebook. This time he wrote the piece in Figure 4-5:

When my father was in Vietnam I wasn't around. He sent letters home to my mother and brothers and sisters. I know they were scared.

In 1978 I was born. My father was already home. One morning my father James found his medal in his junk closet.

I never imagined growing up without a father. He could of died in that war. I never thought of it that way. I'm sure my mother did. The subject never comes up at home. But I think of it every night.

In the Army you have to get shot to get a Purple Heart. Being shot at is good enough. I wonder what I would do if I was in the Army?

Lt. Craven, it has a nice ring to it. Jogging 20 miles, 50 push-ups, and cheap food.

Just watching war movies I know what my father went through. I'm glad he's home and everyone's happy.



Figure 4-5 Ramell's Piece

When my father was in Vietnam I wasn't around. He sent letters home to my mother and brothers and sisters. I know they were scared.

In 1978 I was born. My father was already home. One morning my father James found his medal in his junk closet.

I never imagined growing up without a father. He could of died in that war. I never thought of it that way. I'm sure my mother did. The subject never comes up at home. But I think of it every night.

In the Army you have to get shot to get a Purple Heart. Being shot at is good enough. I wonder what I would do if I was in the Army?

Lt. Craven, it has a nice ring to it. Tagging 20 miles, 50 push ups, and cheap food. Just watching war movies. I know what my father went through. I'm glad he's home and everyone's happy.

Ramell and his classmates at P.S. 7 do not keep their reading logs separate from their notebooks. Instead, in their notebooks they move from recording cherished phrases from a book to commenting on their sister, from questioning why an author wrote a story to recalling a hurt dog they saw in the alley. Entries that explore why they've lost interest in a book are set alongside entries that explore memories and feelings. This juxtaposition is a powerful brew—and a logical one. Writer Vicki Vinton, who supports this way of physically merging reading and writing, says, "After all, the me who notices something at the Metropolitan Museum isn't any different from the me who notices something in a book or from the me who writes a story or teaches a class."

There are other Project classrooms, however, in which children do keep their reading logs separate from their notebooks. This is most apt to happen if the reading log serves institutional as well as personal purposes. If children are

including lists of books they have read and predictions of how stories might end in their reading logs, if they are exploring questions that will be discussed in response groups, then it may seem best to keep reading logs separate from notebooks. In these classrooms, however, teachers will want to encourage children to copy and question and bounce ideas from the reading logs into their notebooks. Teachers will also want to urge youngsters to have their notebooks open when they read aloud to the class.

In conferences with a child, then, as well as in mini-lessons, we may want to encourage the child to use the notebook as a place for responding to his or her reading. "What has Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* made you feel about your own life?" we might ask in a writing conference. But the most important reading a writer can do is the reading of his or her own words. In another conference, we might say, "Last night I reread my notebook and just started noticing the ways I write and the ways I don't. I noticed, for example, that I never just list things, that most of my entries are long, that I write more about what I'm thinking than what I'm seeing. You may want to look over your notebook and take an inventory of what you do in it." The teacher may invite two children to study their notebooks together, talking about what each has and has not included. The teacher may ask a child whether the entries written at home seem different from entries written in the writing workshop. Also, as we move among the desks or talk with students at the back of the room, we may want to pick up on threads introduced in our mini-lessons.

For the first week or two in the year, when the mini-lessons tend to be about ways of noticing the world and when most children are still collecting and generating writing, it probably will not be appropriate for writers in share sessions to read their rough drafts aloud and receive questions and suggestions from the audience, as they did in the share sessions I described in *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Instead, teachers might use share sessions as opportunities for students to reread, celebrate, and learn from their notebooks. When the class gathers in a circle at the close of the workshop, the teacher may suggest that everyone search through their notebook pages together for illustrations of the kind of entry that was highlighted that morning. "Did anyone use their notebook as a place for recording an interview?" the teacher might ask, or "Has anyone included questions and things they wonder about in their notebook?" "Does anyone have an entry that begins by discussing one topic and then meanders to other, surprising and new topics?"

The risk is that when teachers invite children to record observations, for example, this can be regarded as a mandate, and notebook entries can begin to reflect the child's dutiful effort to please the teacher rather than that child's actual thoughts and impressions. There's no easy way to avoid this, because if we simply suggest that youngsters write whatever occurs to them, children tend to reproduce the kinds of writing they felt pleased a previous teacher or to record daily summaries because they equate notebooks with journals. Notebooks are not journals, nor are they a collection of the same rough drafts children would normally keep in their folders. The reason to let youngsters

know that they can copy sections of a book, raise questions, or create long fantasies in their notebooks is that this may prompt youngsters to see notebooks as something new and open-ended.

And so, as teachers we walk a thin line. We want to suggest possibilities for using notebooks, but we also want to give youngsters the space to invent their own. The best way to walk this line may be to bring a stack of our children's notebooks home often and look through them, hoping to learn not only about our children and their writing but also about ourselves and our teaching. We will inevitably notice patterns across many of the notebooks, and those patterns can give us windows onto our teaching. If many children begin entries with phrases such as "There are things in my house that I wouldn't throw away . . ." and "There are sayings in my family such as . . .," we will realize that while we thought we were encouraging diversity and wide-awakeness in notebook entries, we have inadvertently been giving our students story starters and assigned topics. There's no great harm in the fact that we've done this; we have, after all, prompted only a jotted entry and not a major piece of writing. But the power of the notebook—or the lifebook, as some children call it—is greatly diminished if a well-intended teacher's hand is evident throughout.

The wonderful thing is that when not only teachers but students, too, are encouraged to experiment and play with lots of different kinds of entries and bring notebooks home to reflect on the kinds of entries they have written, we can learn a lot about ourselves and our interests as writers. The question "What does it mean that I write in this manner?" can be a light, easy question or one that acts as a plumb line to the most important issues of our lives.

The Wells We Draw from When We Introduce Notebooks

How do we create a climate in our classroom in which this will happen? I know of only one answer: we write. We keep our own notebook (or file box, folder, daybook, stack of papers) beside us as we live. When we and our colleagues keep notebooks of our own, we have wells to draw on when we teach. Then, if we see Rebecca tearing a giant wad of paper from her notebook during social studies because she forgot to bring paper to school, our dismay is deeply felt. "How could you? This is your notebook," we say, and it's not so much what we have said that reaches through to Rebecca but what we have felt.

When we keep our own notebooks, if John seems to scribble only one or two brief entries into his notebook each day, we remember doing the same thing. "When I first started keeping a notebook," we say to him, "I filled it with lists of ideas that I might write about, but I didn't think of the notebook as a place for actually writing the pieces out. Is that how you're thinking?" When John answers, "No, it's just boring to put down what I see and stuff," we remember that our notebook became more important to us once we'd seen how it can nourish the process of producing publishable writing, and so we begin to talk with John about the possibility of moving into a project.

If we keep notebooks ourselves and move from those notebooks into larger writing projects, then we can anticipate and respond to the predictable problems that will emerge. But more than this, if we keep notebooks, we will expect and welcome diversity. We will soon come to know, in a deep-seated way, that there are wide variations in how and why writers keep notebooks. Some people always write in sentences and paragraphs; others often include lists and sketches. Some people do most of their writing in jotted notes as they carry their notebook about with them, and others write mostly at their desks during a predictable period each day. Some people continue with their notebook even when they are drafting and revising a piece, and others let the notebook slip into the background when a writing project moves into the foreground. Some people prefer not to have a notebook at all but instead gather and muse on papers they keep in files or shoeboxes, and others do none of this generative and reflective writing. And that is as it should be. In the end, it will be the diversity in our classrooms rather than our mini-lessons and conferences that extends what we and our students do in our notebooks.

